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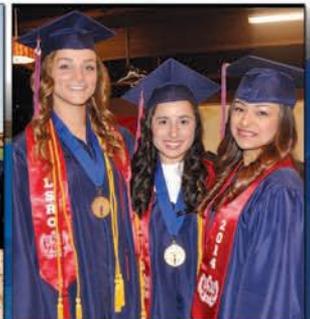


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CONTENTS

April 2015 • Volume 10, Issue 4



8 Serving Those Who Need Her Most

Tonyeka Drake draws from her past to help others in need.

16 Shabby Chic

At Home With Michael and Tonya Morales.

22 Outdoor Living Texas Style

Enhance your property and enjoy yourself
in your own backyard kitchen.



28 BusinessNOW

30 Around TownNOW

36 CookingNOW

ON THE COVER



Lady Drake's challenges turned
into a ministry serving others.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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Editor's Note

Hello, North Ellis County Residents!

Looks like we made it! Another chilly winter is in our rearview mirrors, and more seasonable temperatures are on the way. The harsh chill of winter provides us with a deeper appreciation for spring. The seasonal rains are sure to produce a vibrant display of wildflowers!

Spring is one of my favorite seasons. It's so refreshing to walk outside and feel the warmth of the sun and a gentle breeze. And Mother Nature

begins to showcase her beauty, as leaves begin to reappear on trees, flowers begin to blossom and gardens begin to grow.

There are so many ways to enjoy spring. You can plant a garden, landscape your lawn or just get rid of a few weeds. It's such a beautiful time of year — make sure you get a chance to enjoy it!

Happy Easter!

Dianne

Dianne Reaux
North Ellis Co. NOW Editor
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Serving Those Wh

— By Dianne Reaux



Many people say they refuse to be defined by their past, but Tonyeka Drake would not be one of those people. As a young child, she experienced domestic turmoil and lacked the guidance of a supportive family structure. But rather than allow her past to write her story, Tonyeka turned the page on hurt and mistrust, and she now serves others to help them recover from their emotional wounds.

Tonyeka Drake has always had a heart for helping others. “I felt a calling on my life for the ministry even when I was a little girl,” Tonyeka shared. “I didn’t quite know what it was, because I grew up in a chaotic home full of hurt. But now that I’m older and able to reflect over my life with a different perspective, I realize that the chaos of my youth is what helped to define and direct my life’s calling and my purpose.”

Tonyeka now lives in a beautiful subdivision of Ovilla with her loving and supportive husband, Gregory, and their three children, Jhaida, Jhaila and Gregory, II. She grew up in

Who Needs Her Most



Houston in a home with circumstances that were less than ideal. “I was very young when my mother decided to get married,” Tonyeka shared, “and unfortunately, there was a lot of chaos and dysfunction in our home. My mother and stepfather didn’t have the communication skills that might have helped to diffuse family confrontations, which often escalated out of control. And neither of my parents were equipped with parenting skills to help me deal with the dysfunction that was so much a part of

our household. Most of the time I was left on my own to deal with the emotional fallout.”

Eventually, Tonyeka reached her limit and wanted a fresh start in Dallas. She was a senior in high school, and at that time, her father, Warren Horton, was an officer with the Dallas police department. Her father fully supported her decision to relocate, and it proved to be a wise move on Tonyeka’s part. Her father’s love and guidance became the strong foundation she needed in

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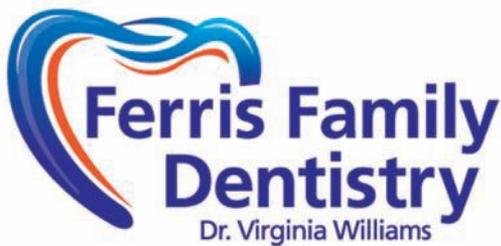
her life, serving as an anchor during the adjustment phase of her transition.

"After moving to Dallas, I graduated from high school and attended college for one semester, Tonyeka shared. "I started working at Levine's, which is where I met my husband, Gregory Drake." Tonyeka found herself on a journey that eventually helped heal many of the wounds from her own hurtful past — a journey that would allow her to serve and help others.

"Church had always been important to Gregory and me," Tonyeka explained. "And we also believed it was important to serve others. Gregory enjoyed serving as a youth pastor, and one day he told me he felt called to be a church planter.

"At first, I was afraid, because I was still dealing with my own wounds. I internalized my hurt and was mistrustful of others. I didn't feel capable of helping anyone else. But when you walk by faith, you have to be willing to surrender your fear and be led."

At that point, the ministry was just a vision, but her husband also shared his vision with his father-in-law. And when what initially seemed like a random opportunity presented itself to purchase church furniture and equipment,



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Tonyeka's father presented them with a check, and the seeds of their ministry were sown.

Jubilee Community Church was formed in 2003. Here, Pastor and Lady Drake continue to live their ministry by reaching out to serve others. One of the church's mottos has been, "We're excited about our future!" And to that end, Jubilee Church has formed an array of ministries to facilitate outreach in the community.

Tonyeka has seen Jubilee Church impact many lives, but there is one family she will never forget. "A lady with three daughters started attending our services," Tonyeka shared. "The mother was very reserved, and her daughters wouldn't talk or play with the other children. They always walked to and from church, and refused rides to take them home. We eventually learned she was trying to escape an abusive spouse and lived in a shelter where the location had to remain undisclosed.

"Slowly, this family began to trust our church family, and the mother began to open up and share her story. Our church members embraced her, and because of the trust formed, we became a support system for her and her girls. It was such



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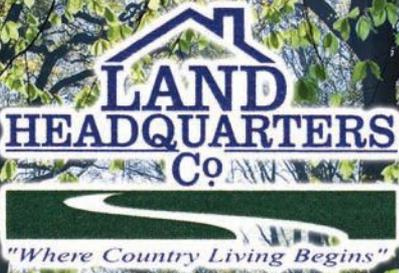
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a blessing to witness the transformation in her life and that of her children. We witnessed her evolution from being a victim to being a survivor, and she began to stand on her own emotionally and financially."

But it wasn't the only transformation taking place. Tonyeka began to understand the hurt she'd experienced in her life had not been in vain. Her pain provided her with an empathy for victims of abuse she might not have otherwise had, and she also discovered her passion for helping those struggling with the same issues she once experienced. Tonyeka continued to evolve, personally and professionally.

Between working, raising a family and serving as the first lady of Jubilee Community Church, Tonyeka returned to college to finish the undergraduate degree in business she'd abandoned her first year living in Dallas. She enrolled in Dallas Baptist University, where she graduated in 2014 with a master's degree in counseling.

Tonyeka has volunteered with The Family Place, a women's shelter in Dallas. And in 2006, The Family Place celebrated her as an honoree during their First Ladies Against Domestic Violence awards banquet, in recognition of her work with domestic abuse victims. This spring, she completed the required internship counseling hours, and after passing the state exam, she will be a certified Licensed Professional Counselor.

"For many of us, life isn't the fairytale we've read about in storybooks," Tonyeka stated. "Life can be full of hurt and disappointments, but I believe that if we can learn to show compassion and not judge others by what we can see only on the surface, we are in a much better place to serve those who need our help the most." **NOW**

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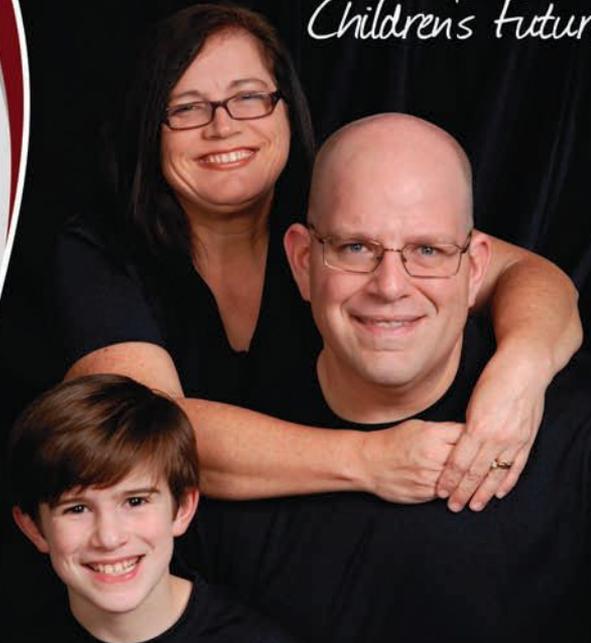
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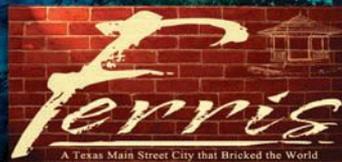
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SHABBY CHIC

— By Callie Revell

At Home With Michael & Tonya Morales



Two years ago, Michael and Tonya Morales moved into their current home. Now, the house is finally starting to feel like theirs. With three children — Isabel, Elisa and Adam — Michael and Tonya needed a home with room to grow, but not too much room to maintain. They found what they were looking for and more in this house in the Eastridge neighborhood of Red Oak.

Searching for a home to fit their needs took longer than expected. “We looked at several different houses in a lower price range,” Tonya said. “After looking around, we decided on a higher price range, and this





was one of the first houses we saw after that.” In their previous house, Isabel and Elisa had to share a bedroom, and it was important to Michael and Tonya to find a house with a bedroom for each of their children. Since the house they chose only has three bedrooms, they decided to improvise for Adam. “This house has a study we’re using as a bedroom,” Tonya said. She also appreciates the neighborhood and her neighbors. “It feels safe and quiet,” she said.

To Michael, the house needed less work than other houses they saw. “Most of the other houses we looked at still had all the builder-quality finishes, such as linoleum floors, cheap light fixtures and carpet in the living areas,” Michael said. “Our house had some upgrades already done, and we liked what the previous owners had chosen, for the most part.”



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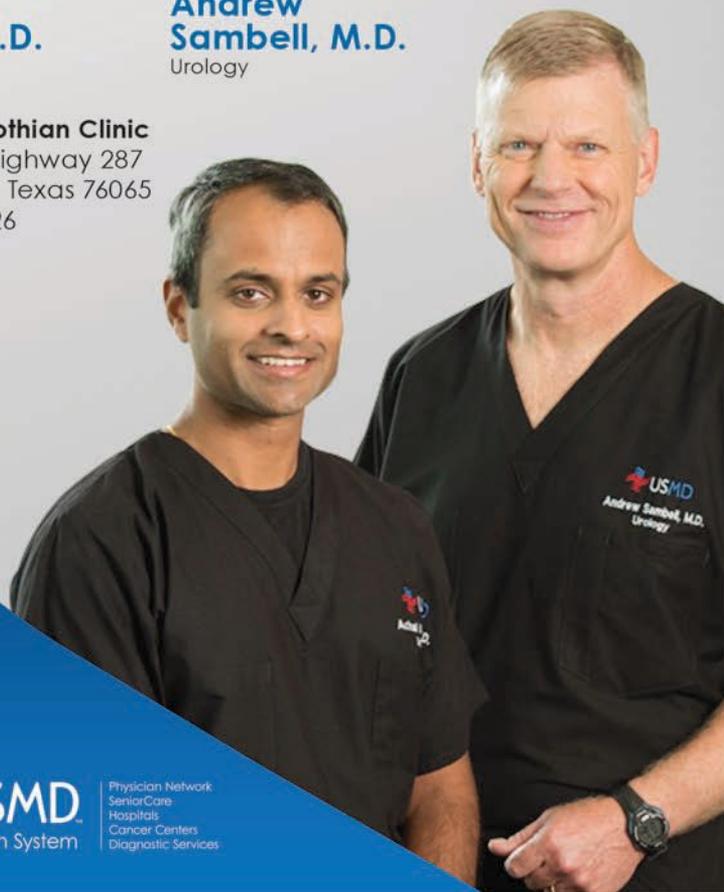
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Their home features a spacious kitchen completely open to the living room. They use the dining nook off the kitchen as an office space. Because it was intended to be the study, Adam's room at the front of the house has double doors, but no closet. Decorated with a sports theme, it's perfect for a 9-year-old. The girls' rooms are separated by a bathroom, and they chose the decorations and paint colors themselves. The master bedroom features a high ceiling and a luxurious bathroom.

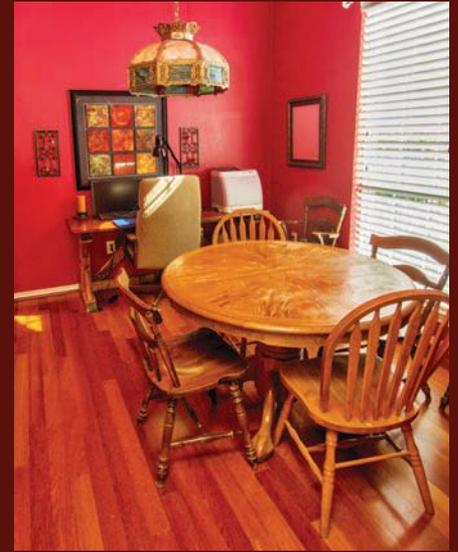
"Everything was pretty much new when we moved in," Tonya said, agreeing the previous owners had good taste that matched theirs. "We liked the paint, so we really haven't done anything major

to it." Since they haven't made any significant renovations to the house, their main contribution has come through decorations and furnishings. Tonya describes her style as shabby chic. She prefers a rustic feel that is comfortable and accessible. So far, settling into the home has been a very smooth process.

"We've made our house personal through decorating," Michael stated. "We have a very rustic style, and we love things some people would throw away. I have a passion for repurposing." Michael remakes old wood into beautiful pieces of furniture, and many pieces in the home are his own creations. "Isabel wanted a new bed right before we moved

to the new house," Michael remembered. He did some research online and found a website with tutorials and videos to guide him through the building process. "They were very generous with their plans and documented their processes with photos and descriptions," Michael said.

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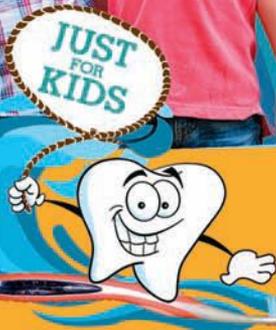
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Final schedule published April 10 on CityOfFerris.org
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“Those ladies inspired me to give it a shot, and I’ve been eagerly learning about joinery techniques ever since,” Michael said. “It’s a great feeling to show guests all the stuff I’ve built. I also feel like I’m carrying on my dad’s propensity to attempt to fix anything and everything rather than paying someone else to do it.”

Michael’s projects around the house have the rustic charm Tonya prefers. “The biggest change, so far, is the master closet, which was previously builder-grade, but is now completely custom,” Michael said. He constructed closet shelves from the same wood he uses for his furniture. He also built a large M for the entryway, a TV stand and a desk for his daughter’s bedroom. He loves to create and build, and has been using the garage as his woodshop. His next project will be the headboard in Elisa’s bedroom.

One of Tonya’s favorite features of the house is the backyard, but not for its huge size or intricate landscaping. In fact, she likes it for quite the opposite reasons. “We wanted a smaller yard,” Tonya said. “We lived on over an acre before, but it was really hard for us to keep up and care for.” The yard is the perfect size for the family and their dog, with a patio, gazebo and a small lawn requiring only minimal care. Their deck furniture rotates, depending on what Michael has built. In the spring and fall when the weather is warm, the family enjoys spending time on the back patio.



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However, the favorite gathering area is the living room, which Tonya considers the central hub of her home. She prefers to have her family spend time together whenever they can, so having a common area has been great for her. "We had our older house built, and we purposefully built smaller bedrooms because we didn't want the kids in their rooms all the time," Tonya said. "Here, we have bigger bedrooms, and they all have their own space, but they still spend a lot of time in the living room." However, the big space is still not quite big enough for Michael and Tonya's extended family. "My husband has six brothers, and five are married with kids, so we can't fit all of them here," Tonya said.



Together, they still have projects to finish, like painting the master bedroom and renovating the bathrooms, but they are very happy with one thing they can't change about their home: the location. "We moved to Red Oak originally because we wanted to have a friend build a house for us. Red Oak offered the freedom to do that with reasonable land prices," Michael said. "We've stayed because we love the schools. Our first house was in unincorporated county, and we moved into the city so our kids could stay in school in Red Oak in case the enrollment was ever closed to outside students."

While Michael and Tonya sometimes consider moving to a new house, they know they'll stay in the Red Oak school district and keep a small backyard. For now, though, they are perfectly content in their home. "We have plenty of space, good neighbors, and we're really close to most of the schools," Michael said. "It's a huge blessing!" **NOW**

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Outdoor Living

Texas Style

— By Carolyn Wills

Understandably it's no surprise Texans have long loved the joys of cooking and eating "out." Where else (OK, besides California) is the climate so conducive to outdoor living and the people so inclined to share great weather and food with family and friends? Texas is where perfectly prepared barbecue reigns as the undisputed goal for bragging rights, the governor's inaugural celebration fare and clearly the all-time favorite at holidays, family gatherings and Western-style weddings.

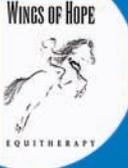
Even our original and beloved TV show, *Dallas*, is credited with affecting America's outdoor cooking. According to www.lagrillislands.com, when the Ducane Company, a grill manufacturer, was asked to create a special island grill for the wealthy oil-drilling and cattle-ranching Ewings, their prefab design, consisting of dual grills surrounded by spacious counters, not only fulfilled the Ewings' needs but resulted in a huge demand from homeowners, which in turn, led to a whole new product line for the grilling industry.¹ The original *Dallas* series aired from 1978 to 1991, and today, that special prefab grill remains a backyard standard for many outdoor cooks.

Dallas, though, is not alone in its influence. Today, broadcast channels like HGTV and DIY Network have introduced homeowners to the bigger, brighter, fancier world of fully functioning outdoor kitchens.





Outdoor kitchens, aka patio or summer kitchens, have been around for decades, but according to www.outdoorkitchenfranchise.com, it took a collapsing housing market to spark their super surge in popularity. In the mid-2000s, the housing market plummeted and many homeowners saw the wisdom in and even necessity of staying home, remodeling. In the process, they realized the advantages of outdoor living, especially in climates like Texas.²

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In a 2012 Residential Trend Survey, the American Society of Landscape Architects found America's infatuation with outdoor kitchens is continuing. So, what's it all about, then, this interest in cooking, dining and entertaining in the wide (or not-so-wide) expanses of the backyard?

First, the Downsides:

- An outdoor kitchen is forever linked to weather conditions.
- Kitchenware and appliances can suffer from exposure and, potentially, are also vulnerable to theft.
- Noise, smoke and odors might challenge neighbors.
- Depending on layout, materials and features, an outdoor kitchen can be costly to build, and without careful consideration of standards, values and market conditions, their end return could prove negligible.
- Costs are not declining. From a few simple features to a chef's dream, outdoor kitchens range in cost from \$3,000 to upwards of \$100,000. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, high-end outdoor equipment manufacturer, Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet, says their average outdoor kitchen built in 2012 cost \$40,000, up from \$30,000 in 2010.³

Now, the Upsides:

- Outdoor kitchens are fun, which is the No. 1 reason to have one. They encourage time outside, cooking, relaxing with family and friends, swimming (if there's a pool), watching TV, having parties or intimate dinners and enjoying food that can only taste so good because



it's cooked outside. Let's face it, nothing compares to the flavor of a grill or an outdoor pizza oven.

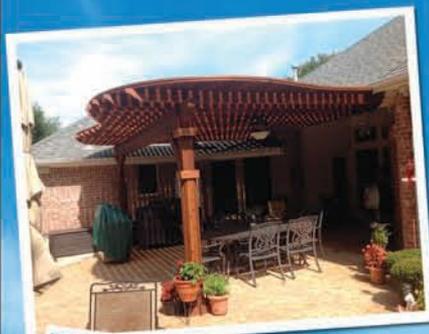
- They add to a home's livable space and entertainment options.
- They help equalize cooking duties and encourage group participation with meal preparation and cleanup.
- They engender a certain pride of ownership. With luck, when it's time to sell they become a hot selling point with potential profit on investment, or at the very least, an extra drawing card for potential buyers.
- They keep heat, smells and mess outside for lower utility bills and a cleaner house.
- In North Texas, they offer year-round use (well, maybe a little less in August and September).

What You Need to Know:

- Outdoor kitchens designed with homeowners' needs and budgets in mind offer the greatest return on enjoyment, investment and peace of mind.
- The grill must be the star attraction.
- Hiring a contractor is a good idea. (Some projects may allow for do-it-yourself skills, but professionals are needed when plumbing, electrical and gas are involved.)
- Use wisdom: Be aware of neighborhood home values, stay close to that standard and beware of overbuilding.
- Permits, codes and standards vary by city. In Texas, permits are generally required for any home improvement beyond painting or simple cosmetics. Be aware and adhere to codes and standards (another advantage in hiring a contractor).

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• When designing an outdoor kitchen, it's smart to complement the home's exterior, decorate for the comfort of the indoors and resilience for the outdoors and to pay attention to flooring, walls and ceilings.

• Within budget, it's advisable to buy top-of-the-line appliances starting with the best barbecue grill.

Today, outdoor kitchens can be accessorized to the hilt with the likes of Sub-Zero refrigerators, stoves, pizza ovens, bread warmers, custom cabinetry, stone work, soaker sinks, trash compactors, barbecues, espresso makers, wine coolers and kegerators. They can be shaded by a pergola, canopy or finished ceiling and accompanied by sound systems, ceiling fans, flat screen televisions, sofas, outdoor rugs, cocktail tables, fire pits, water features and fancy landscaping.

For homeowners who love cooking, entertaining and the outdoor lifestyle, the upsides of having a personal outdoor kitchen greatly outweigh the downsides. Options are endless. Building can involve do-it-yourself, budget-conscious work and the whole process can be done in stages. Texans, other than the Ewings, can also afford the joys of an outdoor kitchen, since Texas is the perfect place to have one! **NOW**

Sources:

1. "Grill Islands; Your Customizable Outdoor Kitchen." LA Grill Islands. www.lagrillislands.com.

2. "Outdoor Kitchen Market Grows as the Housing Market Shrinks." Soleic Outdoor Kitchens. Outdoor Kitchen News, Outdoor Living Industry. Posted November 29, 2012. www.outdoorkitchenfranchise.com.

3. Jackson, Candace. "Take it Outside." *Wall Street Journal*, June 21, 2013. www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324188604578543622976022866.



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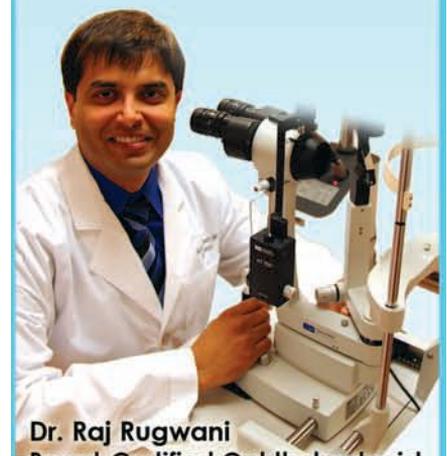
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April Showers Bring May Flowers

Ronnie and Judy Foster of Turf-Scape, Inc. are professionals in landscape management.

— By Dianne Reaux

Spring is when many people start thinking about spending more time outside, and taking care of their lawns moves up higher on their list of priorities. While April is a good time to focus on lawn maintenance, Ronnie Foster knows it's never too early to start thinking about taking care of your lawn.

From humble beginnings and 25 years of lawn and landscaping experience, Ronnie has become a leader in Ellis County landscape management. "I started this business with a high school friend to make extra money," Ronnie explained. "After graduation, we both attended community college. We were getting so much business,

we had to be careful not to take on too many customers, so we could have time for our schoolwork." Eventually, Ronnie's buddy transferred to a four-year university, and because they'd gained so many customers, Ronnie decided to pursue his landscaping business full time.

Turf-Scape, Inc., is a fully licensed and insured landscape management operation. "We offer a wide range of commercial and residential services including irrigation installations and repairs, backflow testing, new landscaping designs, lawn management, fertilization, weed control, lawn maintenance and

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tree services.” Ronnie stated. “We do it all! Many people consider April to be the beginning of the spring season, and a lot of residential homeowners want to start getting their yards into shape.”

“A homeowner’s lawn is important for many reasons, one of which is curb appeal,” his wife, Judy, added, “especially to those who are considering buying or selling a home. Many people focus on the importance of the interior of a home, but the outside is the first thing residential visitors and commercial customers see. The outside of your home or business is an extension of what’s inside, so you want the outside landscape to mirror the interior character of your home or business.”

Judy has been working with her husband full time since 2009, and has become a lawn management expert in her own right. “Last January, Judy passed the irrigation exam through Texas Commission Environmental Quality and is now a licensed irrigator (TX LI. 21842),” Ronnie stated proudly. This license is required by the state of Texas to install or maintain irrigation systems. Judy is also recognized by the Texas Department of Agriculture as a licensed pesticide applicator for fertilization and weed control (TDA 0513565), one of very few women in Texas who holds both licenses.

Drought conditions, and concerns have escalated across the entire state, and the city of Waxahachie was looking for a way to promote water conservation. Turf-Scape was instrumental in helping convert a portion of the city’s irrigation to a drip system. “This system is highly effective because water is absorbed directly into the soil, and it helps prevent water evaporation and runoff,” Ronnie explained. “In the first quarter of 2013, we helped the city save 28,000 gallons of water.”

Their business philosophy is simple. “Nothing is more important to us than our customers,” Ronnie shared, “and we’re always going to provide our very best service.” The Fosters believe that when you take care of your customers, they are satisfied customers. “Customer service is our highest priority,” Ronnie stated, “especially in a small town — your name means a lot.” **NOW**



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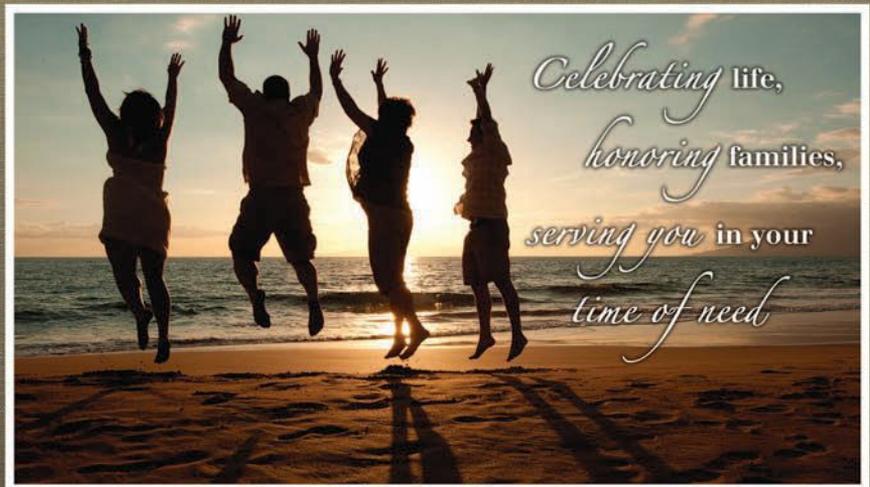
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Ellis County's Madison Boyd (front, center) signs to play soccer with Lubbock Christian University this fall.



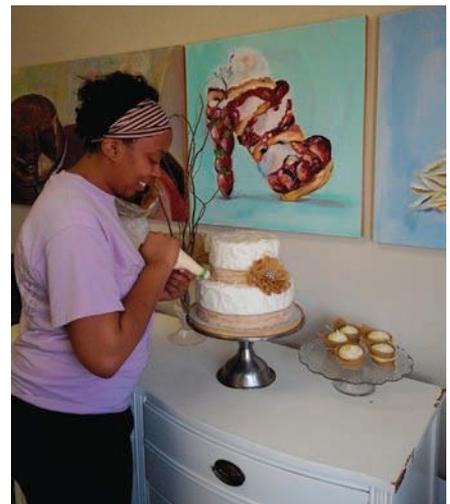
Ferris library clerk, Irma Pozo, provides hands-on guidance as Robert Sills works to update his technical skills.



Greg, Dylan, Caleb and Brandon chuck up their dences for the camera while hanging out at Subway in Ferris.



North Texas Law enforcement agencies team up to raise funds for Special Olympics.



CeCe Pettigrew finishes the creative touches on an Italian creme cake at Uncle Willie's Pies Bakeshop and Catering.



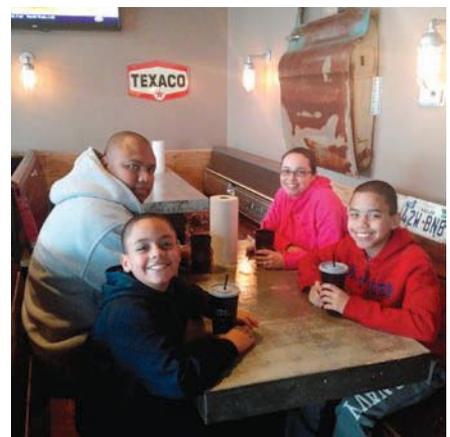
Tina Miller arranges collectibles on a display in her Country Corner Treasures antique shop.



Red Oak Police Chief Garland Wolf shows his support for Special Olympics.



Mattie McCollister finishes arranging her spring floral display in Walmart.



Johnny, Janie, Cedrik and Marcus enjoy a Saturday afternoon family lunch at Branded Burger Co. in Red Oak.



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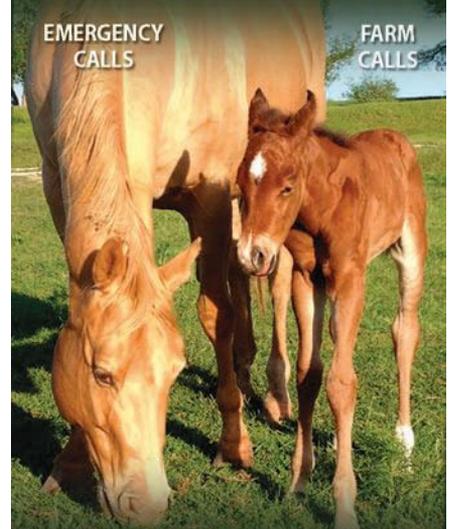
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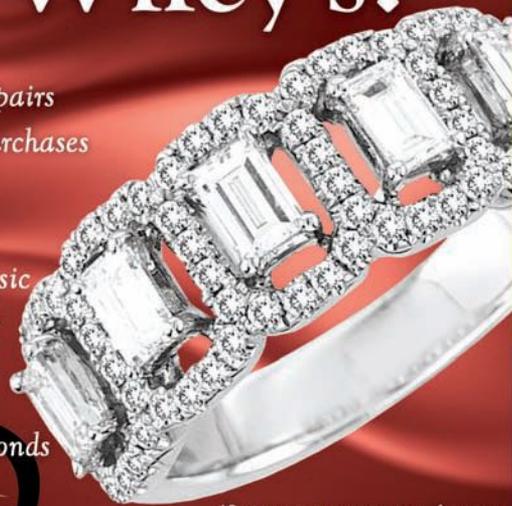
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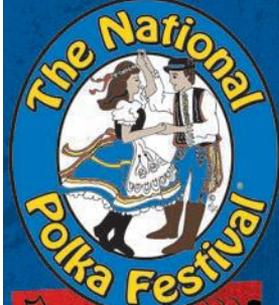


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Measles Again

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

What is going on with measles? The United States was well on its way to eliminating this viral infection from this country. But today, measles (*rubeola*) is making a distressing comeback in big numbers. Recently, a visitor to Disneyland ended up bringing more than expectations for a fun-filled day. This person brought measles, which set off a reaction of contagion across multiple states and involving over 100 people. Many of those who were diagnosed with measles were directly connected to the case at Disneyland.

Over the years, there has been a steady decline in immunization rates. More and more citizens are traveling to countries that are still battling the disease. Reason dictates if you haven't been vaccinated, travel to a country with measles and come in contact with someone with the infection, you are more than likely to contract the infection and bring it home with you. Those who come in contact with you who have not been immunized will more than likely get measles, too. And, so the cycle will repeat itself until the immunization rates start to rise again.

Measles is highly contagious, which makes it so easy to catch from another person. Adding to the difficulty of contagion, measles is transmissible about four days prior to the rash's appearance. The symptoms of coughing, runny nose, sore throat, fever and conjunctivitis are symptomatic of many respiratory

illnesses. Unless someone knows they have been exposed to measles, the diagnosis of measles probably will not be made until a rash known as Koplik spots appear.

Measles is not a benign illness. Thirty percent of people who get measles also develop secondary infections such as pneumonia, bronchitis, inflammation of the brain, diarrhea and ear infections. Measles in pregnant individuals can lead to premature birth or even pregnancy loss.

If you do contract measles, rest as much as possible. Take palliative measures to ease your symptoms, such as fever reducers and drink lots of liquids. Fever can be dehydrating. A humidifier can be helpful for your cough and sore throat. Check with your doctor before taking herbal supplements or vitamins for your symptoms.

If you want to eliminate your chances of contracting measles, then immunization is the most recommended course of action. If you choose not to take advantage of immunization, then please follow your doctor's instructions on what to do in case of a local outbreak. The only way to avoid the illness is to get your shots. **NOW**

This article is for general information only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult with your physician if you have questions regarding this topic.

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April 4

8th Annual Waxahachie Community Free Easter Egg Hunt: 11:00 a.m.-noon, Getzendaner Park, 400 S. Grand Ave. This event is for children ages 0-12. A separate gathering area will be available for children with special needs.

April 6 — April 11

Ellis County Youth Expo: 10:00 a.m., Ellis County Expo Center, 2300 W. US Hwy 287, Waxahachie. This is the 23rd year all the communities of Ellis County will come together to support the FFA, FCCLA and 4-H members of our county. For a complete list of events, visit www.elliscountyyouthexpo.com.

April 11

North Ellis County Business & Community Expo: 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., Red Oak High School cafeteria. Taste local treats, door prizes every hour and bounce houses for the kids. Free admission with one canned good benefitting the North Ellis County Outreach Center. For more information, visit www.redoakareachamber.com.

April 12, 19

Uptown Downtown Desoto Concert Series:

3:00-5:00 p.m., Desoto Corner Theater, 211 E. Pleasant Run Rd. **April 12:** Artina McCane, piano and Icy Renee Simpson, soprano. **April 19:** Andrea Dawson, sophisticated blues. This concert series celebrates diversity in music, alternating each week from classical to jazz.

April 18, 19

Ennis Bluebonnet Trails Festival: Enjoy two days of arts and crafts, bluebonnet souvenirs, children's activities, exciting live music and scenic country rides taking in all the beautiful wildflowers with a Bluebonnet Trails map. Free admission.

Kachina Prairie Wildflower Walk: **Saturday**, 11:00 a.m.; **Sunday**, 2:00 p.m., Kachina Prairie Park, W. Baldrige St., Ennis. Wildflower walks will begin at the park entrance and will be canceled in the event of inclement weather.

April 19

2015 Antique American Independent Automobile Show: 10:00 a.m -3:00 p.m., N. Main St. W., (between Belknap and Baylor Streets in downtown Ennis). The event will feature cars and trucks manufactured by extinct corporations from days gone by, i.e.

Packard, Kaiser, Graham, Nash, Hupmobile, Hudson, Studebaker and more.

April 24, 25

A Retreat for Women: **Friday**, 7:00 p.m.; **Saturday**, 3:00 p.m., Lakeview Camp and Retreat Center, 5128 FM 66, Waxahachie. For more information, email moreretreat@lakeviewcamp.net. To purchase tickets, visit www.lakeviewcamp.net/more.

May 2, 3, 9, 10, 16, 17, 23, 24, 25

Scarborough Renaissance Festival: For more information, call (972) 938-3247 or visit www.srfestival.com.

May 8

26th Annual Texas Scramble Golf Tournament: 7:00 a.m., sign in; 8:00 a.m., shotgun start, Country View Golf Course, 240 W. Beltline Rd., Lancaster. Proceeds benefit the ROACC Scholarship Fund. Rain date is **May 11**. For more information, visit www.redoakareachamber.org or call Shelley Martinez at (972) 617-0906.

Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your current event details to dianne.reaux@nowmagazines.com.

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In the Kitchen With James Fischetti

— By *Dianne Reaux*

“My earliest memory of cooking is my grandfather helping me scramble eggs when I was around 7 years old,” James shared. Now, James works as the lead patrol sergeant for the Ferris police department, and with 27 years of law enforcement experience, he’s seen his share of potluck dinners.

“The fire department is next door, and occasionally, we’ll share meals. I like spicy foods, and enjoy preparing Mexican dishes,” he stated. “I’ve learned a lot from watching my wife, Yolanda. I use her recipes and add my own unique ingredients.”

James shared his philosophy on preparing meals for others. “It’s one of the favorite ways families spend time together. They get to show gratitude by sharing a meal.” **NOW**

Ro-Tel Chicken Spaghetti

- 1 10 3/4-oz. can of cream of chicken soup**
- 1 10-oz. can of Ro-Tel Diced Tomatoes with Green Chilies**
- 1 clove garlic, minced (or 1/2 tsp. garlic powder)**
- 1/2 tsp. onion powder**
- 1 Tbsp. margarine or butter**
- 8-oz. box of spaghetti, cooked and drained**
- 3 to 4 large boneless breasts, grilled, baked or rotisserie**
- 1 8-oz. box Velveeta cheese, cubed**

- 1.** Mix the first 6 ingredients together in a pot on medium heat until mixture begins to simmer.
- 2.** Shred or cube chicken, if desired, and add to pot.
- 3.** Melt Velveeta in a separate container in the microwave or in a pot on top of stove.
- 4.** Pour over spaghetti and enjoy.

Grilled Cilantro Lemon Chicken Skewers

- 2 Tbsp. lemon infused olive oil (or regular olive oil with 1 tsp. lemon juice)**
- 4 Tbsp. soy sauce**
- 2 tsp. Sriracha Hot Sauce**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- 3 Tbsp. fresh cilantro, chopped**
- Juice from 2 small limes**
- 4 uncooked skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cubed**
- 1 red pepper**
- 1 red onion**

- 1.** Mix together first 6 ingredients in a medium-sized bowl.
- 2.** Add the cubed chicken breasts to mixture. Marinate in the refrigerator for 2 hours.
- 3.** Cut red pepper and red onion into small chunks.
- 4.** Alternately place marinated, cubed chicken with red peppers and red onion onto skewers.

- 5.** Grill until chicken is fully cooked. (Note: If using wooden skewers, soak them in water before grilling.)

Sausage Biscuit Bites

- 1 lb. pork sausage**
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese**
- 2 10-count cans flaky biscuits**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 400 F
- 2.** Mix uncooked sausage and cheese; shape into 40 balls of equal size.
- 3.** Separate each biscuit into halves (40 halves). Press 1 half into each lightly greased cup of mini cupcake pans.
- 4.** Place one sausage ball into each cup; top with remaining biscuit halves.
- 5.** Bake for 8 to 10 minutes, or until biscuits are browned and sausage balls are bubbly.

Pork Chops and Chili Cheese Sauce

- 10 Roma tomatoes**
- 3 jalapeños**
- 2 oz. olive oil**
- 1 lb. pork chops, cut and diced into bite-size pieces**
- 1/2 Tbsp. cumin**
- 1 Tbsp. salt**
- 1/2 Tbsp. chili powder**
- 1/2 Tbsp. garlic**
- 16-oz. shredded longhorn style cheese**

- 1.** Place tomatoes and jalapeños in a medium pot and cover with water.
- 2.** Cook on medium heat for 10-15 minutes, or until outer layer of tomatoes start peeling off.
- 3.** Heat oil in a medium-sized skillet, and brown chops. Remove pan from heat and set aside.
- 4.** Remove hard stems from jalapeños, add to blender with tomatoes. Blend mixture until smooth.
- 5.** Place pork chops back on burner on medium heat; add mixture from blender; add seasonings.
- 6.** Simmer for 10 minutes; add cheese. Stir until cheese melts.

To view recipes from current and previous issues, visit www.nowmagazines.com.



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